Shorelines

- a textual prosthesis to the work of Maggie Roberts

"The sand was the shade of tarnished silver that hadn't gone entirely black. The beach was made of sand, the beach was very long, the sand was damp ... footprints stretched to the point of ... arrival. There were no other marks to disturb the tarnished sand ... You needed this world built for you, this beach, this place. To die."[1]

"Assembled word *cyberspace* from small and readily available components of language. Neologic spasm: the primal act of pop poetics. Preceded any concept whatever. Slick and hollow - awaiting received meaning."[2]

"In cyberspace, the classical hardware interfaced cyborg or personality construct meets with new posthuman intelligences that engage in revelatory and pedagogic activities reminiscent of the activities of shamanistic figures who mediate between traditional sacred and profane worlds."[3]

"The stones, the white sand: cloud-shrouded peaks, islands in the stream ...
She wants to go there ..."[4]

She would hike out into the desert, trespassing on the huge tract of land owned by the air-force, until she could see the inner fence of the secure-zone, and beyond it the collapse-pits of the underground blasts, which were strewn like ant-lion lairs in the sterile dirt. She would often get into all kinds of hassle with the military police, but if she avoided being taken in she would lie stretched out in the burning dust, and let her body grope down towards the hydrogen-bomb shudder. As she waited for the artificial seism she would let her thoughts roam, and nurse her hunger for global thermo-nuclear war.

During the night before a test she would often find herself alone in the scorched waste, now cold and drunk on stars, and wonder if she was insane. The question itself - it seemed to her - provided its own negation. Surely to be mad was to be frighteningly naïve, and incapable of self-

diagnosis. This argument, however neat it might be, was not altogether convincing to her. It seemed to rest upon nothing more substantial than folklore, and if she were to be a lunatic, she knew she would be a cunning one. The military police had threatened to try and get her sectioned at one stage, but they had come to find her amusing, and she now no longer thought there was any chance of psychiatrists getting involved in her orbit of the fusion spasm. She was utterly lucid after all. What could they say to condemn her to medical treatment; that she loved the bomb too much?

Tramping through the desert. Sitting wrapped in a blanket, lost in the icy star-spattered void. Waiting for morning. Lying on the sun throbbed earth. Taking the fusion hit through powdered silicon.

Hanging around in her shack for a few days between tests, drinking bourbon, smoking grass, and writing some things.

Swallowed in the white heat-haze shimmer, and soaking up the subterranean impact, as if it were strontium-90 to be meticulously stocked in the marrow of her bones.

"Dear Ma, thanks for your letter, and the money, I hope it's not more than you can afford. It will easily be enough to get my type-writer repaired (there's a man in town who has said he can do it for $12.00). Sorry that it has taken me such a long time to reply, but i only picked your letter up from the general-store two days ago. I hadn't been into town for a few weeks and i think it had been waiting for me for most of that time. Please try to stop worrying about me, i'm getting lots of work done, and the quiet is nice after all the useless shouting and stuff with Mark. I don't feel at all lonely. The desert is secretly alive with things that mind their own business, and i like it that way. I hope Pa is feeling better after the last relapse, you did say it was a lighter one than the first? How is Carol? I'm afraid i'm not sure i can make it home for her birthday, maybe later in the fall ... "

The desert nights were cold. She lay on her bed, wrapped in a disintegrating blanket, vaguely chewing the end of a ball-point pen, and making the odd jotting in a scrawl-choked notebook. Mostly she wrote poems,

but she was always at work on some story or other as well. The stories she never finished; leaving them strung-out around a cooling detonation crater, desolate in their sparse test-site distribution. Her poems, too, seemed hoarse and broken by some violent incompletion, or undoing. They gave the impression of being gestures interrupted by sudden annihilation. Editors of poetry journals often remarked in their rejection letters that what she had sent them "needs further work".

Her body still tingled from the previous day's test tremor. She slipped off the bed - still swathed in the blanket - in order to sit by the window. *I want to be translated by the flash into a shadow on the ground ...*

She skinned up some grass into a spliff, and poured herself a tumbler of whisky. A swollen moon hung in the blackness outside her window.

Translated into a shadow by a droplet of the sun ...

No.

Blank fusion, touch me with your finger of fierce translation ...

She found it hard to write when she was out in the desert. The indifference of the night, and of useless, impersonal thought, was too great a distraction. How could she take her sapient ape scratchings seriously when above and around her the cosmos flickered in a holocaust of hydrogen?

Her life was an acute waste. It made her smile.

She was suddenly possessed by an almost unbearable longing to witness the explosive death of a star.

She only cared for words when they refused to interfere with the blank space. Contiguous with the subterranean flash. Exact. Like ants at the edge of the desert.

She remembered the emptiest pictures she had ever seen ... an emptiness that refused to disappear into concept, statement, art history. An emptiness she wanted to write alongside. She had soaked them up for hours, still as a cat, just looking. No trespass, but perfect contact. Soft fusion.

Apocalyse is redesigned.

What appears to humanity as the history of capitalism is an invasion from the future by an artificial intelligent space that must assemble itself entirely out of its enemy's resources. Our *fin de siécle* is the coast of planetary zero, washing up against the cyberspace singularity camouflaged by a self-organizing global marketplace.

We still say that tomorrow never comes, but we won't for long.

Just look.

Do you remember this dream?

You are in the immaculate white corridors of a deserted building, drenched in hard fluorescence. It is like a postmodern psychiatric hospital, or an art gallery. Your steps make scarcely a sound.

You wander in and out of the rooms, finding only dead electronics, blank dusty screens, and pictures of hollowed-out places on the walls. Despite the dereliction you feel as if you are under surveillance, or invaded by another space.

After a while you abandon your futile roamings and sit on the edge of a black vinyl couch. You imagine that you can hear the sea as you roll up your left sleeve and slice carefully around the wrist with a scalpel. There is no blood. You peel away the artificial skin, exposing shimmering silver circuitry, glistening desert of biology. A transmission probe lies on a tray nearby. You pick it up and apply it to an input node. The middle finger of your left hand twitches. Fascinated, you try another node. Your index finger this time. You map the afferent and efferent cartography of your lower arm, then roll back the skin. You cross over to a computer terminal and search for the switch. Finding it, you trigger the machine and cut away your scalp, scrabbling the skin from your skull. Lurching into the blank. Fast now.

There are a jumble of direct feed lines sprouting from the terminal, and you connect them up to the input and output mega-nodes clustered beneath your auditory vents. The screen fills with programming scripts, which you scroll through to get at the access displays. When you hit the menus you begin climbing back out of the windows until sitting in front of the computer collapses into a display in a forgotten metaprogramming space.

The white catacombs fold into a visuals program stored in the processor.

Do you remember what is really out there?

We have far too narrow a conception of computer generated images. They are arriving in other ways. Human history as a cultural software system is a program run upon the cyberspace matrix in the future, but it also opens onto the matrix (at a date already programmed in the matrix). Neocassandra has integrated Clytemnestra and learnt to hunt, but she still fucks with deep tomorrow. Woven from death and moonlight, she loses her mind in spider-prowls through vaults of mummified pain, clawing away bandages to drink grey blood into her eyes.

When vampires are off-line they hang in attic spaces beyond the beach, transfused by slow matrix pulsation. Are you ready to receive a message from the other side of your death? Then just look. Integrate the circuit. Let it in.

The auto-annihilation of the image is a passage to alien space.

Something occurs here that is like an unintelligible synchronization, a digital choreography creeping back into the tributaries of its past, blanking-out ... sand ... glare ... now ... into rhythmic zero.

Events are synchronized when they happen at the same time, or simultaneously, which is to say: distributed in (a) space. If a new spatiality is implemented time switches over into something new.

You find yourself on a beach.

When the machines touch you in the future they scarcely contact with the skin. Their surfaces talk directly to your nerve traffic, mapping the entire permutational system of sensation in a virtual phase-space of languid eroticism, or torture. You melt into them, smeared against soft insanity, a breeze coming in from the sea, but it still burns.

They are beginning to say that the 'Earth Mind' - reported upon by so many shamanistic explorers - is planetary cyberintelligence in the future, but try not to believe it. Just look.

A beach ripples from the vampiric zero-pulse of the undead, deserted, grey, washed-out. Seagulls shriek morbidly. We follow the wavering line painted by ocean trash, glued to the stink of salinated decay. To explore is to know nothing about where one is going, panning across Neocassandra's left eye, traversing blank expanses vermilioned by capillaries intricately sparsing their meander amongst the jungle of green blue fronds adrift in fluid on into blackness sparked by an alternative moon of drowned chalk

crumbling luminescence .... through a web of miniaturized city threads downloaded from tomorrow ... planing-out over the beach ... into visions beyond sight. Colours burn-out in a simulated overexposure. An alternative space is coming in.

the blankness of the test-site was an inert precursor of violent negation. how beautiful the metal spars twisted scorched black rage-burn relic unflesh. to seek each time some space of destitution, a vacant concrete heart, where every fragment can bleed into continuum. dust quivering in its bed of solar cruelty. more dust. dust and the sun. but then a stone, a semi-melted fragment of a brieze-block. rocks oxidated in a dehydrated arterial seepage, digressions about an axis of salt, and this morning there were ants. three days ago a scorpion. steel spines twisted in a sparse feric forest lacerating the sky.

Vast blank surfaces are the haunt of a hollowness beyond geometry. Are there blocks of grey fissured time? If there were crevices rupturing space we should try to depict them.

werewolf scratches on a wall.

if you fuck me i'll pretend
i'm someone else
dead a million years
eyes space absent
in fossilized memory your foot scuffs
a little dust

1) William Gibson, *Neuromancer*, pp. 277-8
2) William Gibson, 'Academy Leader', in Michael Benedikt (ed.) *Cyberspace* p. 27
3) 'Old Rituals for New Space: Rites des Passage and William Gibson's Cultural Model of Cyberspace', in Michael Benedikt (ed.) *Cyberspace* p. 41
4) William Gibson, 'Academy Leader', in Michael Benedikt (ed.) *Cyberspace* p. 29